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The fundamentals of drawing portraits by barrington barber

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A portrait, by definition, should capture a recognizable likeness of its subject, as exemplified by the anecdote about Picasso's Cubist portrait and Matisse's inability to identify it without a moustache. To achieve this, one must spend considerable time in direct observation, noting the unique features that define a person's image. The decision to flatter or be brutally honest with the subject is a recurring debate among portrait artists. While some, like Cromwell, may desire an unvarnished portrayal, most people struggle to accept such an accurate depiction of themselves. Consequently, portrait artists often strive to present their subjects in the best possible light by subtly altering lighting effects, repositioning the head, and employing other techniques to ease tension. Fortunately, nearly everyone possesses a redeeming feature that can serve as the focal point of a portrait. Artists may choose to downplay less flattering aspects, such as a tense mouth, weak chin, or protruding ears or nose. The passage of time also demands consideration, with lines, creases, and sagging flesh sometimes being softened for a more acceptable representation. Throughout this book, portraits have been selected that are at once famous and interesting, offering a range of approaches from which valuable lessons can be learned. Each portrait serves as a teaching tool, demonstrating different ways to capture the essence of human features in various subjects, whether friends, family members, acquaintances, or strangers. Interestingly, despite the minute measurable differences between faces, their appearances are surprisingly varied. The human face has an extraordinary ability to express and convey emotions, which artists have sought to explore for generations through myriad techniques. To improve at drawing portraits, it's essential to practice regularly. Even if you're not drawing faces, practicing other types of drawings, like still life objects, can help enhance your skills by teaching you to observe and capture specific characteristics in different situations. Portrait drawing is considered endlessly fascinating because it offers a wide range of possibilities for expression. To create accurate portraits, it's crucial to understand the structure of the head and features. When starting out, it's helpful to begin with basic anatomical and structural drawings of the head. This will enable you to accurately gauge your subject and capture their likeness in your drawing. Practicing drawing just the main shape of the head can be beneficial for those new to portrait drawing. In addition to understanding the overall structure of the face, it's essential to study the particular arrangement of features, such as the placement and proportions of eyes, nose, mouth, etc. Measuring these features can help, but it's more important to use your drawing practice as a guide to how they relate and fit together. Finally, paying attention to the shape of each feature and how they interact with the overall face shape is critical. Each person sees things slightly differently, but there are objective shapes that can be studied and correctly drawn. The way each lump or bump in each feature relates to the whole face and whether the curves are greater or smaller can make a significant difference in the final result. To improve your portrait drawing skills, practice observing facial features and variations in lighting and expressions. This will help you recognize and draw shapes accurately. When drawing a portrait, focus on capturing the likeness of the subject's face, which is the most distinctive part of any portrait. Start by establishing the overall shape of the head, including the position and relation to the neck. The angle at which you place the head can greatly affect the final result. There are several common portrait positions, each with its own advantages and limitations. Consider capturing the subject's expression in a full face view or using the three-quarter view, which offers a clear view of the eyes and nose. Alternatively, drawing from profile can provide clear definition of features but may result in less expressive portraits. To achieve a realistic representation, follow these five basic steps: 1. Define the overall shape of the head or skull. 2. Determine how the hair covers the head and its relation to the entire head. 3. Establish the relationship between the face and neck. 4. Identify the features that define the individual's characteristics and expression. 5. Refine your drawing with subtle details, allowing you to capture the unique essence of your subject. Don't worry about fine details yet. Instead, focus on capturing the overall shape and positioning of facial features, starting with the eyes. Get their level, size, and shape right, including eyebrows. Next, work on the nose, considering its shape, tilt, and projection from the face's surface. Then, move on to the mouth, gauging its width and thickness, and placing it correctly in relation to the chin. The tonal qualities of shadows can help guide your drawing of the overall face shape. Alternatively, you can start by working from the center outwards, focusing on capturing proportions and distances. This approach is helpful for both experienced artists and beginners. For a three-quarter view, begin with a vertical line and mark the top and bottom points. Then, follow these steps: Phase One: Marking Out Features • Draw a horizontal line for the eyes' position, halfway between the top and bottom marks. • Roughly draw in eye shapes and positions. • Mark the hairline halfway between the top mark and the eye level. • Draw a simple nose shape roughly halfway between the eye level and the bottom mark. The top mark should appear slightly off-center. • Use the vertical line to mark the chin position at the bottom. Phase Two: Defining Features • Define the eyes, eyebrows, and mouth shapes, ensuring correct placement. • Notice how the near-eye appears more full-on than the far-eye. You can start by defining the point where your further eyebrow meets the edge of your head, considering your position. Then, carefully draw in the outline of your nose, including its shape and the shadows it creates on the unlit side. The ear should be positioned between the eye and the nose, slightly off-center, with the distance between the eye and ear relating to the length of the nose. Next, shape the mouth, noting that the half on the further side will appear shorter than the other half, and ensure the center of the mouth aligns with the center of the nostrils. Finally, draw in the pointed part of your chin.